133 Coalcomán, which again reaches elevations of over 10,000 feet. The rain shadow of this [132] range accounts for the subarid conditions of part of the basin area. Although these mountains are little known, apparently they rise fairly steeply on both faces and the coastal area beyond is narrow and of little use.

The drainage of Michoacán presents some peculiarities. In the north and west central region are lakes of various size, of which perhaps the best known is Lake Pátzcuaro. In common with some other lakes in the area, Lake Pátzucuaro has no outlet, but its waters are nevertheless not brackish. The high porosity of the volcanic soil may account for this phenomenon, for the lake has evidently been isolated from other drainages for a long period of time. This isolation is attested by the fact [136] that the native fish are all very primitive viviparous species.

[132] Moreover, despite heavy rainfall in some areas (at Lake Pátzcuaro the average annual rainfall is around 60 inches), there are virtually no permanent streams and even springs are rare. Most Tarascan towns suffer from [312] almost constant water shortage despite the heavy precipitation. In contrast, some of the lower lands have abundant large running streams. In places, underground springs of great size emerge at elevations of about 5,500 feet. Near Uruapan, for example, a large stream is formed by a group of such springs.

131 The present-day range of the Tarascans cannot be defined with great accuracy, partly be- 101 cause of the lack of detailed studies and partly because of the degree of acculturation undergone by many settlements. Villages which outwardly differ in no visible respect from well-known Tarascan settlements often contain no persons speaking Tarascan. All around the edges of Tarascan territory occur villages in various degrees of assimilation to Mexican culture and with various degrees of physical mixture with the Mestizo population. As a result, the present-day distribution of the Tarascans can only be approximated (map 1).

On the east, the basin of Lake Pátzcuaro is definitely Tarascan, although some towns, such as Tzintzuntzan, the traditional capital of the Tarascan "Empire," are no longer Tarascan-speaking. The western edge of Tarascan ter-

[p. 12a]

361 in smaller communities in the nearby mountains.

In the absence of documentary evidence, it
361 may be surmised that Cherán is an old settle-
174 ment. Archeological remains occur at several nearby places which may represent the antecedent smaller aboriginal settlements spoken of in tradition. About the period from the founding of the original settlement until 1910 there are few data, documentary or traditional. Although individuals were encountered who claimed to remember the time of the French intervention in Mexico, apparently events in the rest of the country influenced Cherán very little. Some outside settlers apparently lived in the town before 1910. Frequent references
[167] were made to a German family that owned a considerable amount of land and had a pretentious house on the plaza, now in ruins. Physical evidence in the shape of ruined structures suggests there once were a number of families of greater wealth in the town than is now the case, but apparently, with the exception noted, these families were native Tarascans.

During the revolutionary period, the town
361 was in the center of the agrarian movement in
175 Michoacán. This movement was related to the Zapatista movement in Morelos, and residents of other villages claim to have been Zapatistas. As Michoacán is also a Catholic stronghold, some villages participated in the religious wars of the twenties. Cherán, however, seems not to have taken an active part in any of these movements. Nevertheless, it suffered from them, and more particularly from the generalized banditry which operated under the cover of one label or another. Twice the town was attacked and burned in the period shortly before 1920, the last time being almost completely destroyed. Apparently many hundreds were killed or starved to death, while still more made their way to the United States, starting a migration which continued until 1929. Since that time, the tide of migration has been to the town. Probably a majority of families in town, though, have been in the United States or have relatives still living in the States.

Some general details of the flora of Cherán
137 have already been mentioned. Nothing can be added to these remarks, as the region is un-
136 studied botanically. The situation with respect

1:Beals E-5 (1940-1941)1946 NU34 Tarasco NU34

[p.126]

136 to the fauna is equally unsatisfactory. Despite the extensive forests, wild life is scarce. No
136 one in Cherán gets a living from hunting, and
224 the amount of game taken forms an inconsiderable amount of the food supply. Deer and peccary are sometimes hunted and occasionally damage outlying fields, but they do not seem to be numerous. Squirrels, rabbits, wild pigeons, and quail are among the animals of most economic importance. Badgers are known, but are not eaten. An exception to the general scarcity of wild life is the coyote. This animal appears to be numerous and to be a danger to livestock in the outskirts of the town. Larger predatory animals, such as the jaguar and the mountain lion, are unknown. Informants could recall only one mountain lion being seen or killed in the vicinity of the town. The region is, of course, too high for the absence of the jaguar to be surprising, but smaller members of the genus *Felis* are also rare. Only the wildcat is reported. The rattlesnake and *culebrilla* occur, but are not common. As there are few handicrafts practiced in Cherán, the community is consequently primarily agricul-
[311] tural and the only use of the forests is for lumbering, charcoal making, and grazing.

Little need be said about the people of Cherán
142 or their language. Although white admixture certainly exists in the town's population, there
[144] are virtually no acknowledged Mestizos. Until studies of the Tarascan population are completed, it perhaps will suffice to say that the people of Cherán seem to be typical Tarascans, on the average relatively short and slender, although stocky individuals are not uncommon. Their complexion is relatively dark, the hair is straight, and the features are attractive. Cor-
164 pulence in old age is very rare. Goiter or
147 incipient goiter is common, especially in the mountain towns, although the disease is less frequent in Cherán than in many other settlements. Teeth are bad, a condition observed for the area in pre-Columbian remains also. Not only are caries frequent, but malocclusion is common. Individuals with attractive regular teeth are the exception. (Pls. 1, upper and lower right; 2; 3, center and lower right and left.)

197 The language of Cherán is Tarascan, a tongue which shows relatively few dialectic differences.

1:Beals E-5 (1940-1941)1946 NU34 Tarasco NU34

231 times petted. One reason for having cats is "because they give pleasure." They are given "pretty" names or names of affection such as [552] *Chulita* and *Negrita* ("Pretty Little One" and "Little Black One").

Cats are fed primarily on tortillas, although they usually are given a little of whatever the family is eating. Kittens are given away to friends and relatives; they are never killed, "for there are never enough cats." Strange [754] cats may be associated with witchcraft and might be mistreated or killed, but this apparently does not happen often. Eating of cats is denied, although young fat kitten is reported to be a delicacy for really poor people in nearby Mestizo towns.

Chickens.—Many people have no chickens 235 and no one has large flocks. They are fed, but receive little care. Fowls are sometimes eaten on special occasions, such as a baptism, when a cooked fowl may be presented to the god- [262] father. Eggs are rarely eaten but are sold to [438] traveling egg merchants from Mestizo towns. [435] An average egg will sell for 5 or 6 centavos, which will buy enough beans for a whole family to have a meal, while one egg "will not satisfy even one person."

Chickens are fed whole corn or, if there are very few chickens, *nixtamal* (*masa* or corn dough for tortillas). Chicks are also fed *nixtamal.* Boxes or baskets are provided for nests. The first time a hen wishes to "set," it is not permitted, but it is the second time. Eggs from other hens are never placed under a "setting" hen. Small chicks are placed under box crates to protect them from "*onzas*" (from [136] descriptions, *onza* in Cherán means a small weasellike animal).

Roosters are raised for cock fighting. How- [541] ever, organized cock fights are held only during the fiesta of Octava.

Pigeons.—Although regarded as a domestic animal, pigeons are really wild. Ownership is [422] not clear. As the birds are not fed, but help themselves to stored grain in the lofts of the houses, ownership presumably would be felt for the birds eating one's corn. The matter seems unimportant, as the birds are rarely eaten, although they are used in connection with the San Juan fiesta. If eaten, only adult [262] pigeons are killed.

3:Beals, Carrasco & McCorkle E-5 (1940-1942) 1944
NU34 Tarasco NU34
Sierra Tarascans

574 609 with whom especially friendly relations exist, normally the visitor is not invited into the house yard. Conversation takes place at the gate of the yard; if it bids fair to be protracted, the householder may even step into the street and continue the conversation there, closing the gate behind him.

351 574 184 So far as is known, customs in other mountain towns are similar in all respects except for the attitude toward visitors. In most towns fences are rarer than in Cherán, and the visitor is invited to enter. In Sevina, it is customary for the visitor to push open the gate, pass into the middle of the house yard, and then announce himself. Two Cherán men who accompanied Beals to Sevina, commented at length on this difference; they were quite plainly shocked at the custom.

RELATION OF THE TARASCAN HOUSE TO THE ENVIRONMENT

362 136 The major insect pests are fleas. In some villages there are also bedbugs. There seems little to choose between the various types of structures, although the earthen floor of the kitchen facilitates the activities of fleas. At certain seasons of the year, all Tarascan houses swarm with fleas to such an extent that the residents often cannot get a satisfactory night's sleep.

Apparently, the climatic conditions are not propitious for large numbers of houseflies or related species. Those that do exist, however, have free access into houses. Mosquitoes and other noxious insects are unknown at Cherán.

362 164 [515] In the lack of good medical statistics, it is impossible to estimate the relation between health and housing conditions. Fleas may be responsible for the transmission of some cases of typhus and perhaps other diseases. Relative to most places in Mexico, however, insect-borne disease is probably at a minimum. Head lice and, to some extent, body lice occur, despite thorough weekly baths, and the crowded living and sleeping conditions in the kitchen must facilitate transmission of the insects.

The most serious health hazards of the Tarascan house probably lie in the damp condition much of the year, lack of ventilation, and close crowding of the inmates, especially at night. These conditions facilitate the spread of all diseases trans-

226 tiges remain in some of the mainland towns, where a few farmers fish part-time along the shore to supply local demand (map 19).

136 **The fish resource.**—The native fishes of Lake Pátzcuaro are common to most lakes and streams of the western part of the Mesa Central. Most of the commercially important species belong to the genus *Chirostoma* (Atherinidae), which vary in length from 2 to 12 inches. *C. estor* is the famed *pescado blanco* (kurúča urápiti) of Pátzcuaro; *C. bartoni*, the *charal* or ð'arári, is a tiny species that is sun-dried and sold over a wide area; *C. grandocule* is called k'uerépu, although this term is usually applied to the young of other species. Other genera include small fish, notably akúmaia, or *sardina* (*Algansea lacustris*), ðéua (*Allophorus robustus*), and t'íru, which includes at least four genera of the Goodeidae family (*Goodea luitpoldii*, *Neoophorus diazi diazi*, *Allotoca vivipara*, *Skiffia lermae*). Around 1930 a black bass (*Micropterus* (*Huro*) *salmoides*), called *trucha* or *carpa*, native to eastern North American streams, was introduced into Lake Pátzcuaro presumably to increase a failing fish reserve. The *trucha*, however, upset an established biotic equilibrium by feeding on the small littoral fish, almost exterminating the t'íru and diminishing the stock of ðéua and ð'arári. In addition to fish, freshwater shrimp (šapitu) and frogs (kuanása, *Rana pipens*) inhabit the lake and are often caught and eaten.[136]

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 549]

[136] A large literature exists on the fish resources of Lake Pátzcuaro. The more important works are Ancona et al. (1940), Osorio Tafall (1944), and De Buen (1943, 1944).